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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3116
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0931
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0805
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1381
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1356
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2004
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1324
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0653
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001365

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: OPENING OF UN PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY
CENTRE MORE SHOW THAN SUBSTANCE

REF: ASHGABAT 1335

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: The United Nations Center for Preventive Diplomacy opened in Ashgabat December 10, amidst intense state media coverage and international attendance. Although the Center is to receive an operating budget of about \$2.3 million per year and will have four UN officers overseeing its daily operations, observers have little confidence that the Center will be anything more than a political symbol of friendship between the Government of Turkmenistan and the UN. Tajikistan's President Rahmon attended the event, the only head of state to do so. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) On the eve of Turkmenistan's 12th anniversary of permanent neutrality, the UN, in close coordination with the Turkmen government, opened its Center for Preventive Diplomacy on December 10. Thousands of flag-waving university students, flushed out of classrooms for the day, welcomed regional and international officials, the diplomatic corps, and a cadre of Turkmen government bureaucrats in black Mercedes, as state-run media captured the event's hoopla on tape. After the ribbon-cutting came photos of President Berdimuhamedow with senior regional and international officials, then champagne toasts, then lunch, then a bizarre two-day conference kicked off, where representatives from neighboring countries, regional organizations, and the UN lauded the important future role of the Center and expressed their approval of the Center's location in neutral Turkmenistan. The conference was also highlighted by statements from the Armenian and Azerbaijani contingents, who complained about the lack of attention to their intransigent conflict, and from an Iranian speaker who used his moment at the podium to criticize U.S. policy in the region.

14. (SBU) The foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran, as well as high-level

representatives from the UN, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the CIS, the OSCE and NATO were present. Tajikistan's President Rahmon, already in town for an official visit, also attended and spoke at the opening. The Center's primary goal is to maintain contact with other regional organizations and facilitate coordination and information sharing with them. The Center is also tasked to provide a "political framework and leadership for the preventive activities of the UN country teams in the region." Its focus, however, will be to facilitate regional cooperation on cross-border issues such as terrorism, narcotics trafficking, or water-resource management.

15. (SBU) In truth, however, the Center was the brainchild of former President Niyazov, who began pressing UN officials several years ago to establish a regional office in Turkmenistan that would address regional security problems. Establishing the Center in Ashgabat would also, however, give Turkmenistan the international legitimacy it craves, through an organization that does not clash with the state's self-described neutrality policy. With the advent of new leadership in the country, UN officials decided this year to move forward with the creation of the Center, hoping it would further nurture the relationship between the UN and the government of Turkmenistan as the country moves forward on reform initiatives.

16. (SBU) The Center opened in a former hotel in the Berzengi region of Ashgabat, which the government refurbished and provided to the UN, all expenses paid. The Center is to have a \$2.3 million annual budget and a four-person UN staff with 10-12 local hires to provide support. Former OSCE

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Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan Ambassador Miroslav Jenca had originally been considered for the director's position, but his name has been withdrawn from consideration, and it is unclear now who will head up the Center. (NOTE: The rumor in Ashgabat is that the Government of Turkmenistan rejected Jenca, but no reason was cited. END NOTE.)

17. (SBU) Tajikistan's President Rahmon was in Ashgabat for a three-day visit coinciding with the opening of the Center and also made public statements of support for the Center's mission and Turkmenistan's role as patron. Given the heavy attention the state-run media devoted to the Center's opening, Rahmon's visit here to finalize a deal on the purchase of Turkmen electricity and petroleum products received minimum coverage. After the conference, Rahmon allowed himself to be swept away to the coastal city of Turkmenbashi, where Turkmen officials pressed him for investment in the Avaza national tourism zone (reftel).

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Few in the diplomatic corps believe the Centre for Preventive Diplomacy will ever have a legitimate, actionable mandate to promote dialog and cooperation in resolving regional political and security problems, given the UN's scant description of the Center's organization and mission. The greatest concern, however, lies in the willingness of the UN to be used by the government to establish an international Center that will ascribe international prestige to a country that until a year ago was a poster child for isolationism. It is unlikely the UN will be able to appoint a politically acceptable director who can develop the Center into an effective vehicle for change in this troubled region. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND